

Department of Agriculture

Capital improvement funds approved by the legislature will provide \$3 million for agricultural irrigation projects statewide, including continued work on the UpCountry Maui Watershed Project. With help from matching federal funds, this project will greatly benefit the highly productive agricultural region of Kula, Maui.

Critical funding in the amount of \$250,000 was allotted for electrical and other improvements to the Molokai Irrigation System. While this was only half the amount requested by the Lingle-Aiona Administration, the funding will improve the overall reliability and efficiency of service in this drought-prone region of the state.

In addition, the legislature approved funding for the Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation and the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources to carry out critical research and instructional programs serving the state's \$2.4 billion agricultural industry (HB2009). This research will help Hawai'i maintain a competitive edge in the global market.

This funding will identify new markets, expand existing markets and develop new and existing crops, while preparing students and farmers to meet the challenges of maintaining healthy and sustainable businesses, communities and the environment.

Most disappointing to the department was the House and Senate's failure to enact the Important Agriculture Lands bill. This legislation would have afforded critical protection to the state's most productive lands, which face continued erosion due to urbanization. The initiative would have also fulfilled the State Constitutional requirement to "...conserve and protect agricultural lands, promote diversified agriculture, increase agricultural self-sufficiency and assure the availability of agriculturally suitable lands."

The Administration and the Agriculture Working Group – comprised of representatives of county agencies and of organizations with interests in agriculture, agricultural land and the environment – worked diligently to implement a mandate for the future of agriculture and address community planning needs. But in the final hours of the session, legislators were not able to agree on language for the bill.

- Sandra Kunimoto, Director